

# Waresboro Elementary's Award-winning RTI Practices Help Students Achieve CRCT Gains

Waresboro Elementary School  
– Ware County Schools  
Waycross, Ga

### School Statistics

**Number of students:** 403

**Grades:** K-5

**District Structure:** Rural

#### Website:

<http://www.ware.k12.ga.us/schools/waresboro/index.shtml>

#### Student Population:

28% African-American  
<1% American-Indian  
<1% Asian/Pacific Islander  
59% Caucasian  
9% Hispanic  
3% Multiracial

77% economically disadvantaged  
6% English language learners  
11% special education

### District Statistics

**Number of schools:** 10

**Number of students:** 6,300

**Grades:** PreK-12



Waresboro Elementary began using the Fast ForWord® online reading intervention as part of its Response to Intervention (RTI) practices in 2009, and added the Reading Assistant™ program in 2011. From 2009-10 to 2012-13, the number of special education referrals dropped from 14 to 11 referrals per year. From 2008 to 2012, the percentage of students who passed the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) jumped from 87 to 96 percent in reading/English language arts and from 75 to 94 percent in mathematics. In spring 2013, Waresboro Elementary received the Student Support Team Association for Georgia Educators (SSTAGE) Star Award for Promising Practices in RTI at the elementary level.

### Challenges

Waresboro Elementary is one of six elementary schools in Ware County Schools in rural Georgia. At the Title I school, 77 percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunch.

“We have a high poverty rate in our area and in our school building, more than three-quarters of our student population is economically disadvantaged,” said Susan Newman, principal. “In a classroom of 25 to 30 students, it can be difficult for one teacher to provide the individual attention and interventions each child needs to succeed.”

### Solution

Since launching the Fast ForWord online reading intervention in January 2009 and the Reading Assistant program in 2011-12, both programs have become an integral part of Waresboro Elementary's RTI practices.

Students work on the programs in the school's four computer labs. Two labs are used for class-wide, Tier 1 instruction and interventions. Two labs are designated as RTI labs and used only for students receiving Tier 2, 3 or 4 interventions.

“We created our school schedule to allow our Tier 2, 3 and 4 interventions to happen in the RTI labs when teachers take all of their other students to the computer lab,” said Newman. “This allows us to get every classroom in every grade level into a lab every day. We believe our programs have been successful because we are dogmatic about having our children attend and be fully present for their interventions every day.”



## Fast ForWord

The Fast ForWord program accelerates learning by applying proven research on how the brain learns. The program addresses reading skills and concurrently develops foundational cognitive skills like memory, attention, processing, and sequencing. These cognitive skills are central to all learning, resulting in improved outcomes for reading and other subject areas, too.

At Waresboro Elementary, students work on the Fast ForWord program 30 minutes a day, five days a week. It is a key intervention used with struggling learners at Tiers 3 and 4, and with Tier 2 students who demonstrate difficulties with attention and focus. The Fast ForWord products have also been used with students on a Tier I watch list, who struggle with attention problems that have not been addressed with medication or who have not responded to other interventions. Tier 4 students who are English language learners and students who receive Speech/Language services have also benefited from the program.

“We administer a universal screening to all students three times a year. Meetings are held with our teachers and intervention specialists every six to nine weeks — or more often, if needed — to review progress monitoring data to ensure we’re meeting the needs of our students,” said Newman. “If we see children beginning to struggle based on their data, we often recommend Fast ForWord as their intervention to ‘retrain their brain’ as a means to move them back to Tier 1 support. If they continue to struggle, we recommend them for a possible tier support move, where they visit a designated RTI lab staffed by a trained RTI interventionist.”

According to Newman, the RTI interventionists play a critical role in the success of the school’s program. “Two reasons we have such great results are that we have great interventionists and we put a lot of emphasis on using the Fast ForWord program with fidelity,” she said. “In our RTI labs, we intervene as soon as a child begins to show signs of difficulty. If students are not successfully mastering an exercise and a red flag appears, they know they can raise their hand and get immediate assistance from the RTI interventionist. That helps a lot.”

Newman has also found that the Fast ForWord program is particularly helpful first thing in the morning with students who have significant deficits in their processing skills or who have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. “It settles students in and gets them in mood for learning. When they go to class afterward, teachers tell me they’re more focused and attentive,” she said.

As students advance at their own pace through the Fast ForWord products — including the Fast ForWord Language Series and the Fast ForWord Reading Series — the teachers and RTI interventionists monitor their progress using online data analysis and reporting tools. In addition, Newman can monitor student performance at the school, classroom and individual levels to encourage implementation fidelity and student growth.

“I love getting the Fast ForWord reports. If I see participation levels drop from 100 percent to 95 percent, I can ask our RTI interventionists why. Because I regularly review the data, like they do, they know I care,” said Newman. “We also do weekly goal setting with students and chart their performance each day in the Fast ForWord program. When students meet their goals, they’re rewarded with ‘bucks’ they can collect and spend in the treasure chest. It’s very motivating to students.”

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## Reading Assistant

The Reading Assistant program is also used as a Tier 1 intervention at Waresboro Elementary. Reading Assistant provides individualized online reading coaching for every student. It helps students rapidly strengthen vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, maximizing their ability to read to learn.

“Many of the programs we use at Tier 1 are very skills-oriented. They don’t address students’ reading fluency or tell us about students’ progress in this area, which is really important,” said Newman. “We added Reading Assistant because we needed something new at Tier 1 to help our students develop and strengthen their reading fluency and comprehension.”

At Waresboro Elementary, Reading Assistant is primarily used by students in grades 2-5. While some teachers use the program with their entire class, others use it only with students who are beginning to fall behind their peers. According to Newman, kindergarten and first grade students at Tier 1 have also benefited from use of the program to accelerate or enhance their reading levels.

Most students work on Reading Assistant 30 minutes a day. Reading Assistant “listens” to students as they read out loud, intervenes when the student needs help, and automatically scores students’ oral reading.

“In Georgia, we use the Lexile Framework to evaluate both reading ability and text difficulty using a common metric. We administer the Scholastic Reading Inventory three times a year to determine each student’s Lexile level,” said Newman. “Our teachers have found Reading Assistant to be a great help because it features a range of reading levels to allow for differentiated instruction to meet their students’ diverse needs. It also gives students the opportunity to practice reading in a way that they enjoy.”

## Results

- Data-driven special education referrals
- State award for promising practices in RTI
- Improved CRCT performance
- Highest gains in reading levels in Fast ForWord within the district

From 2009-10 to 2012-13, the number of special education referrals at Waresboro Elementary decreased significantly.

### Waresboro Elementary Number of referrals for Tier 4 evaluation

Year	Number of Referrals
2009-10	14
2010-11	13
2011-12	13
2012-13	11

“Thanks to our RTI practices and interventions like Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant, our special education referrals are now data-driven and more specific to the individual’s area of need,” said Newman. “In the past, we may have sent in referrals for children who were not truly in need of Tier 4 interventions. Now, because we have so much data, we are more targeted and effective in our referrals.”

In recognition of its success, Waresboro Elementary was honored at the state level with a 2013 SSTAGE Star Award for Promising Practices in RTI at the elementary level.

In addition, from 2008 to 2012, students in grades 3-5 made significant improvements on the CRCT, increasing their math scores by an average of 19 percentage points and their reading/English language arts scores by an average of 9 percentage points.

**Waresboro Elementary Grades 3-5  
Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT)  
Percentage of students meeting the standard**

Year	Math	Reading/English Language Arts
2008	75%	87%
2009	79%	91%
2010	93%	96%
2011	90%	94%
2012	94%	96%

“Our CRCT scores show that our student performance has progressively increased,” said Newman. “We’ve also achieved the highest reading gains in the county, according to the Reading Progress Indicator assessments.”

Reading Progress Indicator provides individual, school and district level reports, showing results before and after students’ participation the Fast ForWord program. During the 2011-12 school year, Waresboro Elementary students who participated in the Fast ForWord program achieved an average reading level gain of 12.9 months, the largest gain of all six elementary schools in Ware County.

“Our school system provides us with the opportunity to use the Fast ForWord and Reading Assistant programs in our building. We then have the flexibility to choose how and when to use the interventions based on data, and that’s worked really well for us,” said Newman.

Thinking back on her students’ progress, Newman recalled the school’s early days with the Fast ForWord program. “I remember the first time the Fast ForWord program really impressed me was in my first year here at Waresboro Elementary,” she said. “There was a fifth grade student who lagged far behind in his reading skills; he was receiving Tier 4 interventions. He began the Fast ForWord program in December and, by the end of the school year, made over a year’s gain in his reading level. He completely changed his behavior in the classroom. He went to his intervention teacher and said, ‘I know what was wrong with me. I couldn’t think. But I’m thinking in class now!’ That’s a testimony to what this program does for children. They’re able to achieve success because they’re able to improve their ability to capture, process and retain information. We have a lot of stories like that — with children who haven’t made progress in any other programs, but are now making progress with the Fast ForWord program.”

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